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ABSTRACT

An illustrated story for young children features Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas in 1492. The story begins with Columbus's youth in Genoa, Italy, follows him to Portugal and then to Spain, where he finally received backing for a voyage west to reach the East Indies. The preparations for the voyage and the trip itself are accounted for, as well as Columbus's discovery of the New World and interactions with the "Indians." The book also seeks to place the significance of Columbus's discovery in perspective for young readers. A message from President George Bush focusing on that theme precedes the story. (DB)

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with a message from President George Bush

# CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

## and the Great Voyage of Discovery

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Written by: JoAnne B. Weisman and Kenneth M. Deitch
Illustrated by: Marion Eldridge

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Picture-book Biography Series, Volume 1

# Christopher Columbus

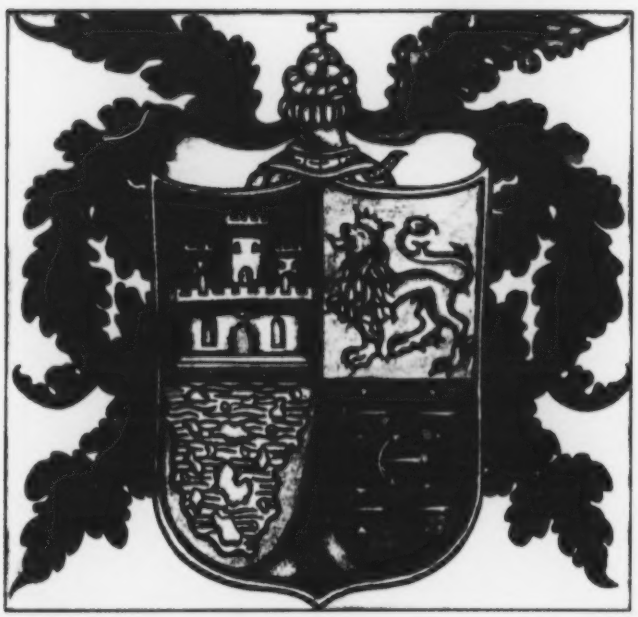
## and the

## Great Voyage of Discovery

with a message from
President George Bush

Written by
**JoAnne B. Weisman and Kenneth M. Deitch**

Illustrated by
**Marion Eldridge**



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**A Word on the Literature**

Adults introducing children to Columbus may want additional information. The bellwether is: Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1942; Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1983). For first-hand flavor, see *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, translated by Robert H. Fuson (International Marine Publishing Company, Camden, Maine, 1987). On the question of which island in the Bahamas is Guanahani, Columbus' San Salvador, see the articles by Joseph Judge (photographs by James L. Stanfield) and Luis Marden in *National Geographic* of November 1986 and also a number of the articles in *Proceedings, First San Salvador Conference: Columbus and His World*, compiled by Donald T. Gerace (College Center of the Finger Lakes, Bahamian Field Station, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 1987).

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*Publisher's Note: President George Bush's letter appeared in its entirety in the May/June 1989 issue of FIVE HUNDRED, the official publication of the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, Washington, D.C. An excerpt from that letter is presented on the facing page with the permission of the White House.*

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

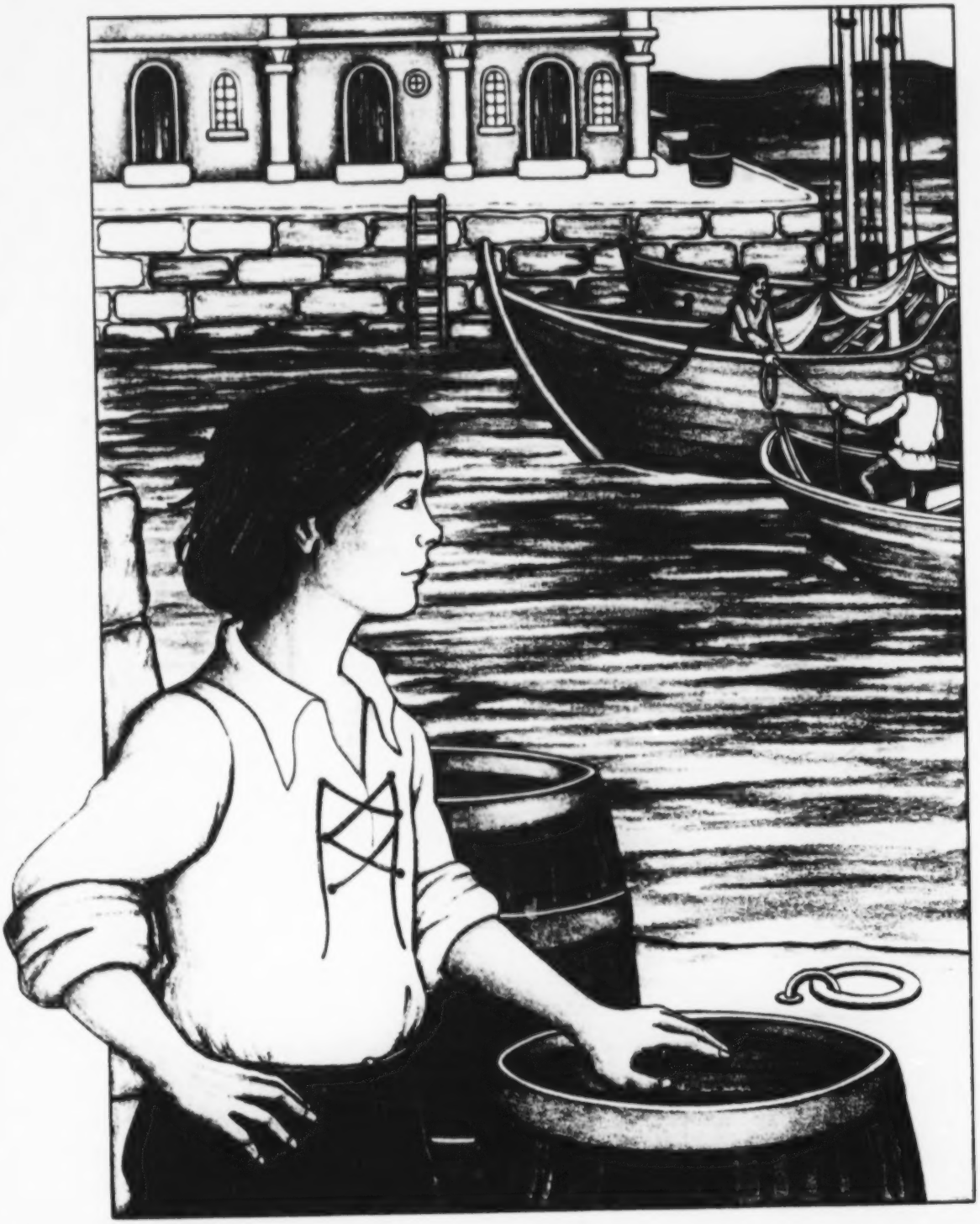
We are approaching a momentous year in history, a year that will mark the five hundredth anniversary of one of the greatest achievements of human endeavor: Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World.

Columbus' first journey took just thirty-three days, but it was to change the outlook of the world forever. His explorations in 1492 led mankind on a path of discovery that has never ceased to challenge and surprise us. As a result of this man's great courage and determination, ideas and people have passed between the Old World and the New World for half a millennium.

Christopher Columbus not only opened the door to a New World, but also set an example for us all by showing what monumental feats can be accomplished through perseverance and faith. I strongly encourage every American to support the Quincentenary, and to discover the significance that this milestone in history has in his or her own life.

God bless you.

George Bush



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## Young Christopher

ive hundred years ago, there was a boy in Italy who loved the sea. In his town of Genoa he often watched the sailors from faraway places, coming and going from the busy port—and he longed to go with them.

Christopher Columbus, for that was his name, learned his father's craft of weaving, but in his mind he was weaving tales of the adventures that he someday would have.

As a young boy, Christopher looked on with keen interest and excitement at the activity in the coves and harbors around Genoa, watching local craftsmen build the sailing ships used for trade in the nearby waters. As he grew up, when he wasn't studying maps and charts with his younger brother Bartholomew, he sailed the Mediterranean and learned everything he could about navigation from the seasoned sailors who were his crew mates. When Christopher was twenty-four years old, he joined the crew of the trading ship *Bechalla*. His adventure on that trip would change the world.

## The Great Adventure Takes Shape

Not far from Cape St. Vincent, a famous landmark on the coast of Portugal, the *Bechalla* was attacked by a war fleet, armed with cannons. Injured and cast into the sea, Columbus grabbed onto a floating oar. He struggled through the water for six miles. When he reached the shore, he found he had arrived in Portugal, near Lisbon, its main city.

Portugal in 1476 was the perfect place for Columbus. Thanks to Prince Henry the Navigator, it had become a gathering place for young men with ambitions for sea adventure. And, as it happened, Christopher's brother Bartholomew had already come to live in Lisbon. He joined his brother in selling maps. This work gave Christopher many opportunities to trade stories with other sailors who yearned to sail to foreign lands and unfold the secrets of a yet undiscovered world.

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Columbus was also thinking of doing what no other European sailor had done—sailing west, across the Sea of Darkness, to reach the East. Although most educated people agreed with Columbus that the world was round, the King of Portugal and his advisors thought that the ocean was too vast to cross. They rejected Columbus' plan to reach the East, but they couldn't discourage the persistent young man.

After nine years, Columbus moved to Spain, the country next to Portugal. There he approached King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella with his idea. For a long time he failed to win their support, but finally, five years later, the King and Queen agreed to sponsor the trip and to allow the determined Columbus to keep a portion of whatever riches he might find. It was decided that he would sail from the Spanish seaport of Palos.

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In May of 1492, preparations began in the port. Two caravels, the *Nina* and the *Pinta,* and the slightly larger and slower flagship, the *Santa Maria,* were readied. The ships were small and made of wood. Most likely, the *Santa Maria* was around eighty feet long, the *Pinta* around seventy feet, and the *Nina* slightly shorter.

Recruiting the crew took much effort. Although the prospect of sailing to new lands and finding gold and spices excited the local sailors, many were also apprehensive about crossing the Sea of Darkness. The experienced members of the crew knew that they would have a crowded and uncomfortable trip at best, and might never again return home, at worst. All in all, ninety men and boys joined the crew, including some as young as twelve years old.

Along with Columbus, as captain of the *Santa Maria,* and

Martin Alonso Pinzon, an experienced sailor from Palos, as captain of the *Pinta,* the King and Queen sent two royal officials. In addition to the sailors, the crew included a doctor, a clerk, a carpenter, a cook, a caulker to repair cracks, a cooper to care for the barrels, a Marshall of the fleet to keep order among the men, and a translator who spoke Spanish, Arabic, and Hebrew.

For weeks the people of Palos loaded each ship's hold with food and provisions—enough to last a year. They brought fresh water and wine, smoked meats, live chickens, beans, biscuits, cheese, honey, garlic, onions, and sardines. Fishing baskets, tools for repairs, and dry wood for making cooking fires were also piled up in each ship's hold. Cats were brought on board to make sure that rats from the harbor would not eat the food supplies.

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## Sailing into the Unknown

n August 3, 1492, the little fleet, with its optimistic, yet somewhat worried crew, embarked on the voyage across the Sea of Darkness, under the command of the adventurous Christopher Columbus.

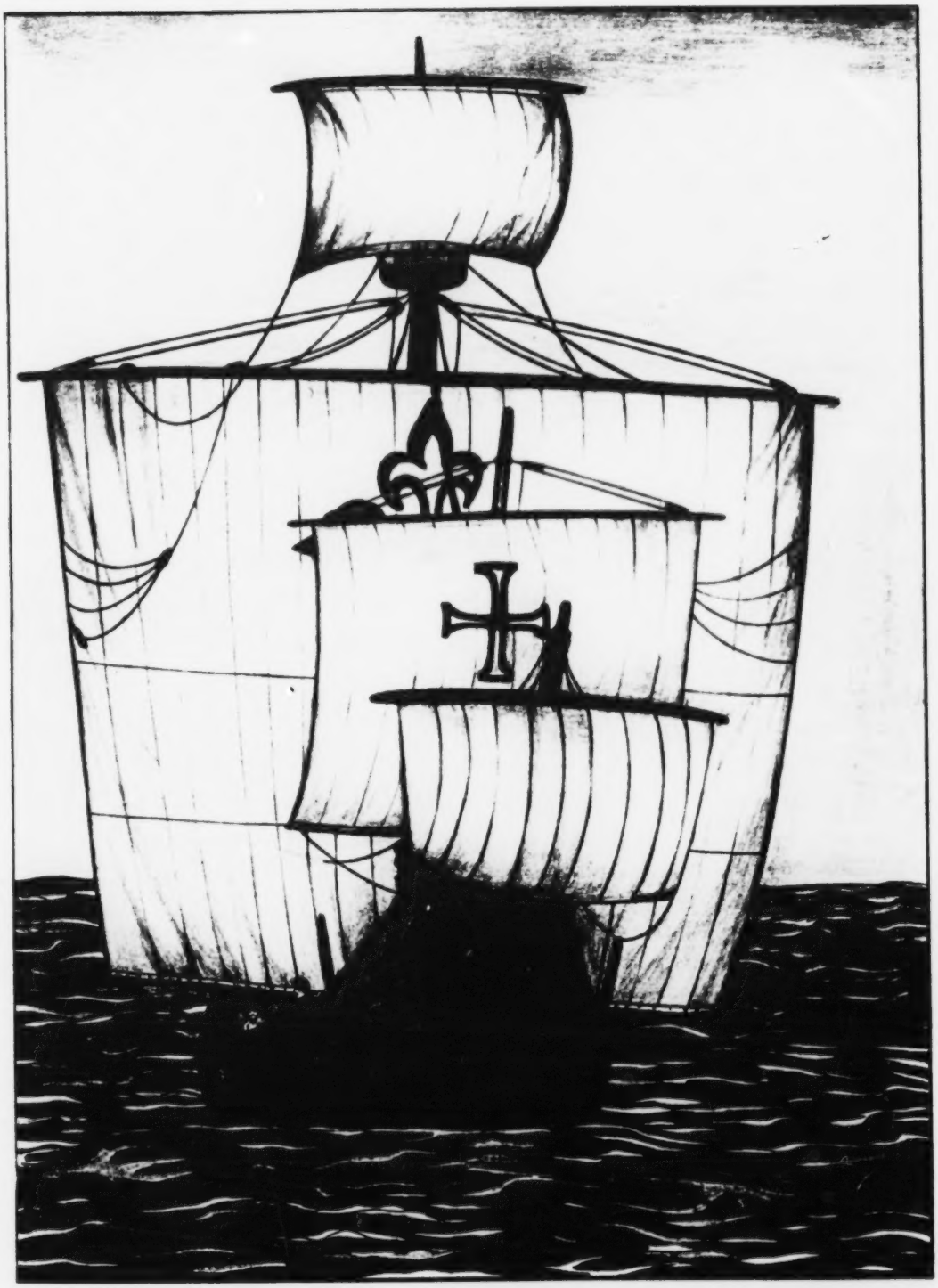
Three days out, heavy seas detached the *Pinta*'s rudder. The small fleet stopped at the Canary Islands for repairs to the *Pinta*, new sails for the *Nina*, and more provisions for the crew. Three weeks later they set sail once again for the Indies.

Life aboard ship was rugged. With no bunks for sleeping, and no place inside to cook or to bathe, the sailors slept, cooked, and ate on the crowded decks, and bathed in the ocean when the seas were calm and clear. To tell time, the ship's boys kept a watchful eye on the half-hour glass, the *ampolleta*, turning it over forty-eight times each day. The ship's compass was the only reliable tool for navigating; sailing by the stars was not done in those days.

Columbus, concerned about his men's courage and loyalty, kept two daily logs of the trip. In his private account, he recorded how far he thought they actually were sailing, day-by-day, and he made notes about the crew and the weather. In the journal he shared with the crew, he put down shorter distances so that the men would not be afraid of sailing so far from home.

For most of the voyage, the seas were calm, and the gentle winds blew steadily westward. About nine hundred miles west of the Canary Islands, the fleet entered the Sargasso Sea, an unusual part of the ocean. For days, the small wooden ships cut through mile after mile of tangled masses of thick green seaweed. Because the seaweed suggested to the men that land was nearby, they were comforted at first. But the farther they sailed, the more frightened they became. As legend had it, the monsters in the sea of floating plants had swallowed up many a ship—and few had lived to tell the tale.

The longer the voyage lasted, the more the sailors wondered how they ever would manage to return home. Columbus continued to calm and encourage them. He reminded them of all the rewards they would receive if they found land. Still, the crew became uneasy and begged Columbus to turn back. About four and one-half weeks out of sight of the Canary Islands, Columbus promised to turn toward home if land were not sighted within three days. In that way, he persuaded the hesitant crew to sail onward in search of India, China, and Japan, at least for a little while longer.



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**"Land! Land!"**

Columbus had a strong feeling that land was nearby. He watched the birds circling the ship and noted the floating bits of oddly carved wood that dotted the surrounding seas. Several times previously, distant clouds had been mistaken for land. This time they wanted to be absolutely sure.

At about two o'clock in the morning of October 12th, from

high atop the mast of the *Pinta,* Rodrigo de Triana, a sailor from the town of Lepe, spotted land. It was an island. There were no telescopes in 1492, and a sailor on lookout had to keep a keen eye on the horizon. The small fleet cut through the seas, illuminated by the almost full moon. The white sand cliffs of the island gleamed in the moonlight, and the silvery sails gently billowed in the wind. Unbeknownst to Columbus and his crew, the island, located in what we today call the Bahamas, very near the coast of Florida, was to provide a glimpse into a civilization that had never been viewed by Europeans.

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## Columbus Meets the "Indians"

rateful and excited, Columbus went ashore with several members of the crew. Exotic trees, colorful talking birds, and tropical flowers enhanced the lush green island. It was inhabited by bronze-skinned people, who must have wondered where these strange-looking light-skinned people had come from. They watched curiously as Columbus planted the royal flag on the beach, claiming the land, which he named San Salvador (which means Holy Savior), for Spain.

The natives called their island Guanahani. They were members of the Arawak tribes that lived on the islands in the Caribbean Sea. The people on the warm sunny island wore no clothes. Many had brightly painted faces and wore tiny gold rings in their noses. Their language seemed strange to Columbus; even the interpreter had to communicate with gestures and pointing. But, as Columbus and his crew soon learned, they were gentle and friendly.

Thinking that he had indeed arrived in the Indies, Columbus called the natives "Indians" and gave them gifts of tiny hawks' bells, red caps, and glass beads from Spain. In a gesture of friendship and peace, they offered Columbus and his shipmates parrots, cotton, and other simple gifts.

Columbus and his companions spent two days exploring the island. Then, with a fresh supply of drinking water, they left in search of another island reported to have vast amounts of gold. Columbus made six Indians go along as guides.

The crew's travels took them past several other islands and on toward Cuba, which they reached by the end of October. At first Columbus thought he had finally found Japan (which he called Cipango). When it became clear that he had not, he wondered whether this land could be China (which he called Cathay).



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His men searched the beautiful island looking for its cities. They also explored the inland rivers for gold. But neither was found.

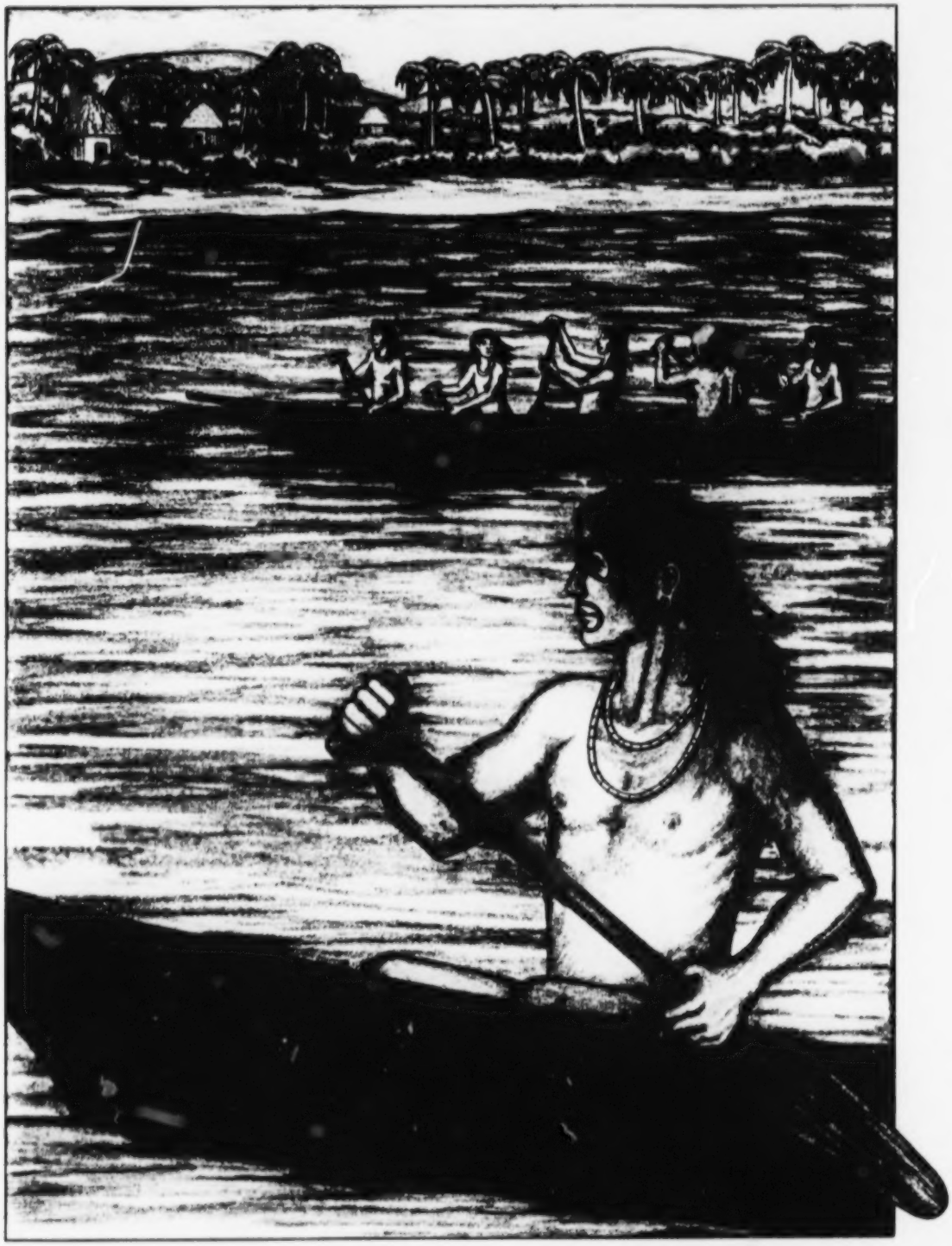
However, there were many exciting new things to see. Columbus noted the way the Indians slept in cloth hung between the trees. The Indians called these cloth beds hammocks. He was fascinated by the Indians' curious practice of rolling leaves, lighting the ends on fire, and inhaling the aromatic smoke through their noses. It was tobacco. Columbus could hardly wait to share these Indian customs with the King and Queen.

## On to Hispaniola

Martin Alonso Pinzon was impatient to find gold. He had heard it was plentiful on the nearby island of Babeque, and on November 22, he and his crew sailed away on the *Pinta* to go and search for it. After several days of waiting, Columbus realized that Pinzon would not be returning any time soon, and he was hurt and angry.

Columbus and his remaining crew further explored Cuba. The natives there were masters of canoeing. Each of the large boats they used was hollowed out from a single log, and the largest of them could hold up to fifty people.

The fruits, vegetables, and plants in the New World were wonderful and so different from those in Spain. Columbus eagerly collected corn, potatoes, cacao, pineapples, peanuts, and tobacco and rubber plants to bring back to his King and Queen.



Still unable to find gold, Columbus left Cuba to continue his search for Japan and China. He soon reached the western end of the island of Bohio, now the country named Haiti. Its beauty reminded him of Spain, so Columbus named the island Hispaniola.

On Christmas Eve of 1492, the two remaining ships were exploring this island's northern coast. On the *Santa Maria,* all hands were asleep except for one young boy who was steering and keeping watch. Accidentally, the ship ran onto a coral reef close to shore. The boy who was steering shouted out, and Columbus rushed to the deck. All around there was a great flurry of activity, but the ship was solidly grounded and damaged beyond repair. As quickly as they could, the local Indians helped Columbus and the crew salvage all of the supplies and carry everything ashore.

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With the *Pinta* gone, and with the *Santa Maria* destroyed, Columbus realized that some of his crew would have to remain in the New World. And so, with the help of the Indians, the *Santa Maria* was disassembled, and its beams were used to build a fort for the men who would remain behind. The site was called La Navidad, which means Christmas in Spanish. About forty sailors remained there, searching for gold and waiting for a ship to return them to Spain.

Columbus and the remaining crew set sail from La Navidad on January 4, 1493, on the small *Nina*. Two days later they had some good luck. They came upon Martin Alonso Pinzon, sailing toward them on the *Pinta*. Columbus and Pinzon made up their differences and eagerly continued their explorations.

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## Heading Home

After a week of sailing and finally finding small amounts of gold in the northern part of Hispaniola, they continued on to another section of the island. This bay was inhabited by a tribe called the Ciguayos. They were the first Indians Columbus had met who carried bows and arrows. And so, Columbus named the bay "Las Flechas" which means "The Arrows." The Indians' faces were stained black with charcoal, and their long coarse hair was fastened in the back with brightly colored parrot feathers.

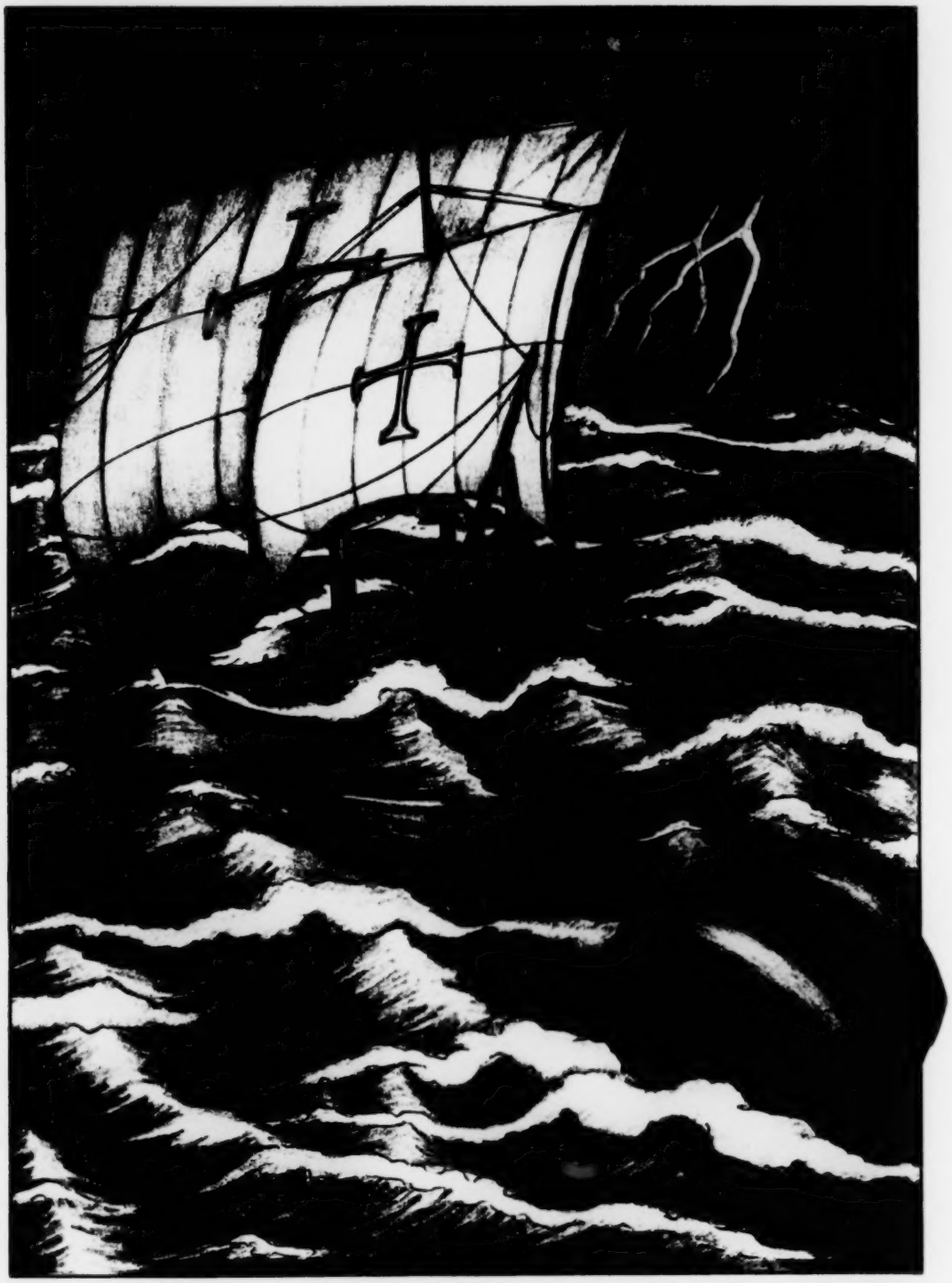
Eager to get away from these Indians, the first unfriendly natives they had met, Columbus and his men departed hastily for home on January 16th. Taking a more northerly route home than the one they had followed across the ocean to the New World proved to be an advantage, as the tiny fleet caught good strong winds blowing from the west toward Spain.

Because Columbus had not originally planned to build a fort in the New World, he hadn't counted on leaving food behind for the men at La Navidad. By the end of January, food was running low on the *Nina* and the *Pinta,* with only bread and wine for the weary sailors. Luckily, by catching a porpoise, a tremendous shark, and many smaller fish, the hungry sailors had food enough to survive the terrifying days ahead.

## Not-So-Smooth Sailing

he two small ships made rapid progress sailing toward home on the westerly winds. However, just as they neared the Azores, Portuguese islands several hundred miles from home, a violent storm arose. The raging winds and churning ocean separated the ships. For five days and nights, the terrified crew of the *Nina* tossed about in the turbulent sea. Worried that the *Nina* might capsize in the storm, destroying all records of the remarkable voyage of discovery, Columbus wrote a brief description of the events, put his document in a barrel, and tossed it into the sea. As far as we know, it has never been found.

Finally, on the 18th of February, the storm subsided, and the battered *Nina* anchored off the coast of the island of Santa Maria, one of the Azores. The *Pinta* was nowhere to be seen.





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## Trouble Brews

board the *Nina,* there was a desperate need for food and water. Three men were chosen to go ashore. When they still had not returned after sunset, Columbus became very worried.

Over the years there had been great competition between Spain and Portugal in the discovery and claiming of new lands. The Portuguese islanders may have thought that the Spanish sailors were unfriendly when they came ashore. Later that evening, three men from the Portuguese island rowed out to tell Columbus that his sailors were with the local official, who wished for more company. The visitors told Columbus of a small chapel on the island, where they would be welcome to pray.

Early the next morning, half of the *Nina*'s crew went ashore to pray for their safe return. While deep in prayer in the chapel, they were suddenly taken as prisoners. Later, when the local official learned that Columbus was not among the captured, and was unwilling to come ashore, he released the prisoners and sent them on their way. Perhaps he was not ready to cause trouble between Spain and Portugal by detaining the Spanish sailors any longer.

For two days the *Nina* sailed on toward Spain, and then a new storm arose. As dangerous as the storm near the Azores had been, it seemed less frightening than the powerful cyclone that ruthlessly battered the tiny boat for almost a week.

This part of the voyage proved to be a far greater challenge to Columbus' courage and navigational skills than any other. Finally, the storm subsided. Early in the morning on March 4th, with only one tattered sail left, the *Nina,* miraculously still afloat, sailed into the mouth of the Tagus River in Portugal and anchored there.

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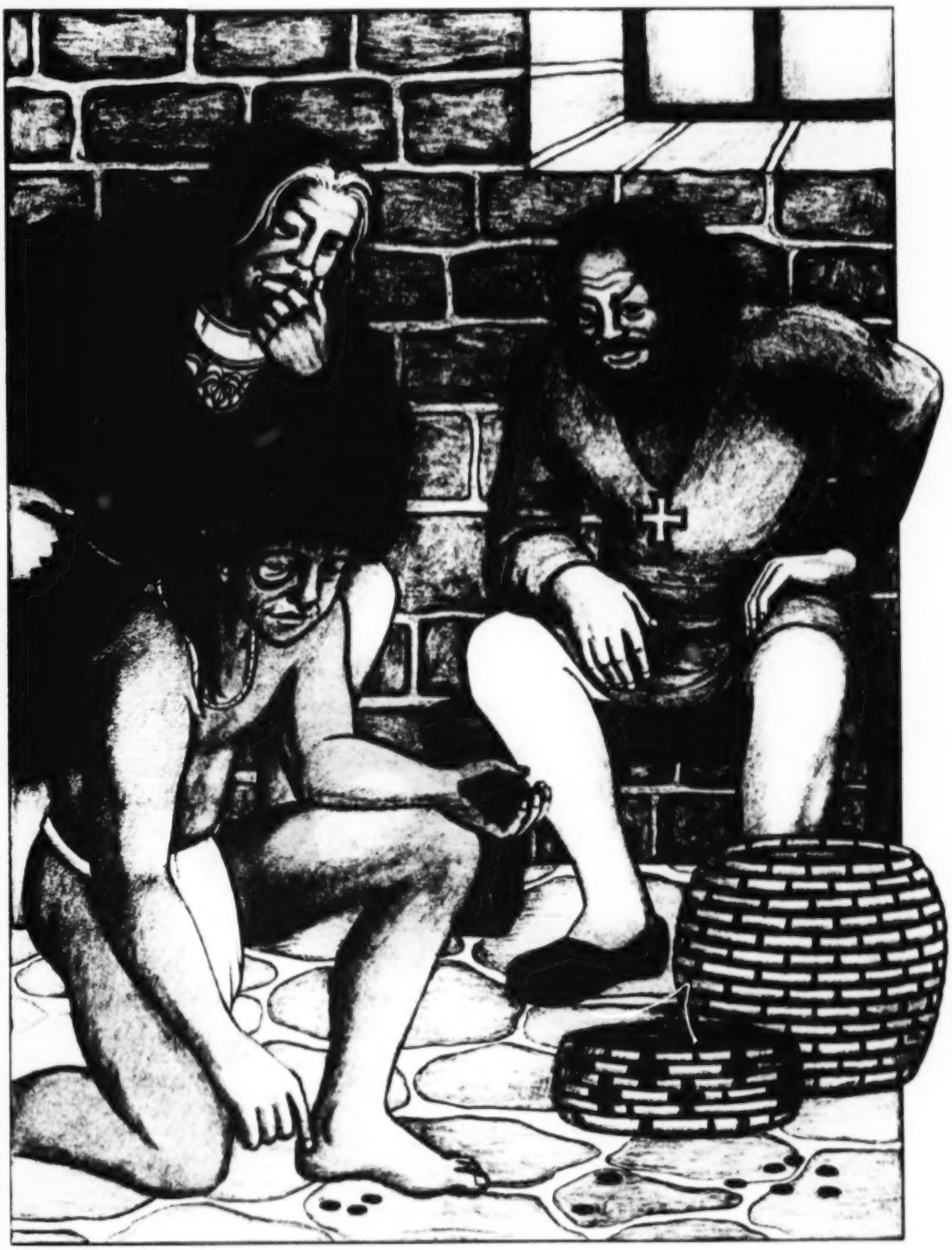
## The First Royal Welcome

lthough disappointed that the landfall was in Portugal rather than Spain, Columbus and his men were thankful to have returned across the ocean unharmed.

Upon hearing of the arrival, Portugal's King John invited Columbus to call upon him at a monastery not far from Lisbon. Columbus had mixed feelings about this King who had turned down his request for support of the voyage years earlier. But along with several crew members and the Indians he had brought back, the triumphant Columbus paid him a brief visit. Columbus delighted in the opportunity to remind King John of his bad judgment in not believing in Columbus' plan proposed years before. The King watched in awe as the Indians used dried beans to create a map of the Caribbean islands on the floor right in front of him.

After a brief visit with the Queen of Portugal, Columbus, anxious to return to Spain before Martin Alonso Pinzon could claim full credit for the discoveries, boarded the *Nina* for Palos.



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## The Triumphant Return

On March 15, 1493, exactly thirty-two weeks from the day the little fleet had ventured out upon the Sea of Darkness, Columbus and the crew of the *Nina* sailed into Palos. Only hours behind him the ill and exhausted Martin Alonso Pinzon, captain of the *Pinta,* navigated his ship into the same harbor. Having hoped to beat Columbus home and claim the victories as his own, Pinzon was distraught. He quickly headed for his country home, and, within a month of going to bed to tend his illness, he died.

Word of Columbus' success travelled fast. As the families and friends of the tired crew rejoiced at the *Nina*'s and *Pinta*'s safe return, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were already making

preparations in Barcelona for the hero's homecoming. They sent for him at once, with the royal invitation properly addressed to Don Christopher Columbus, Grand Admiral of the Ocean and Viceroy and Governor of Discovered Lands in the Indies.

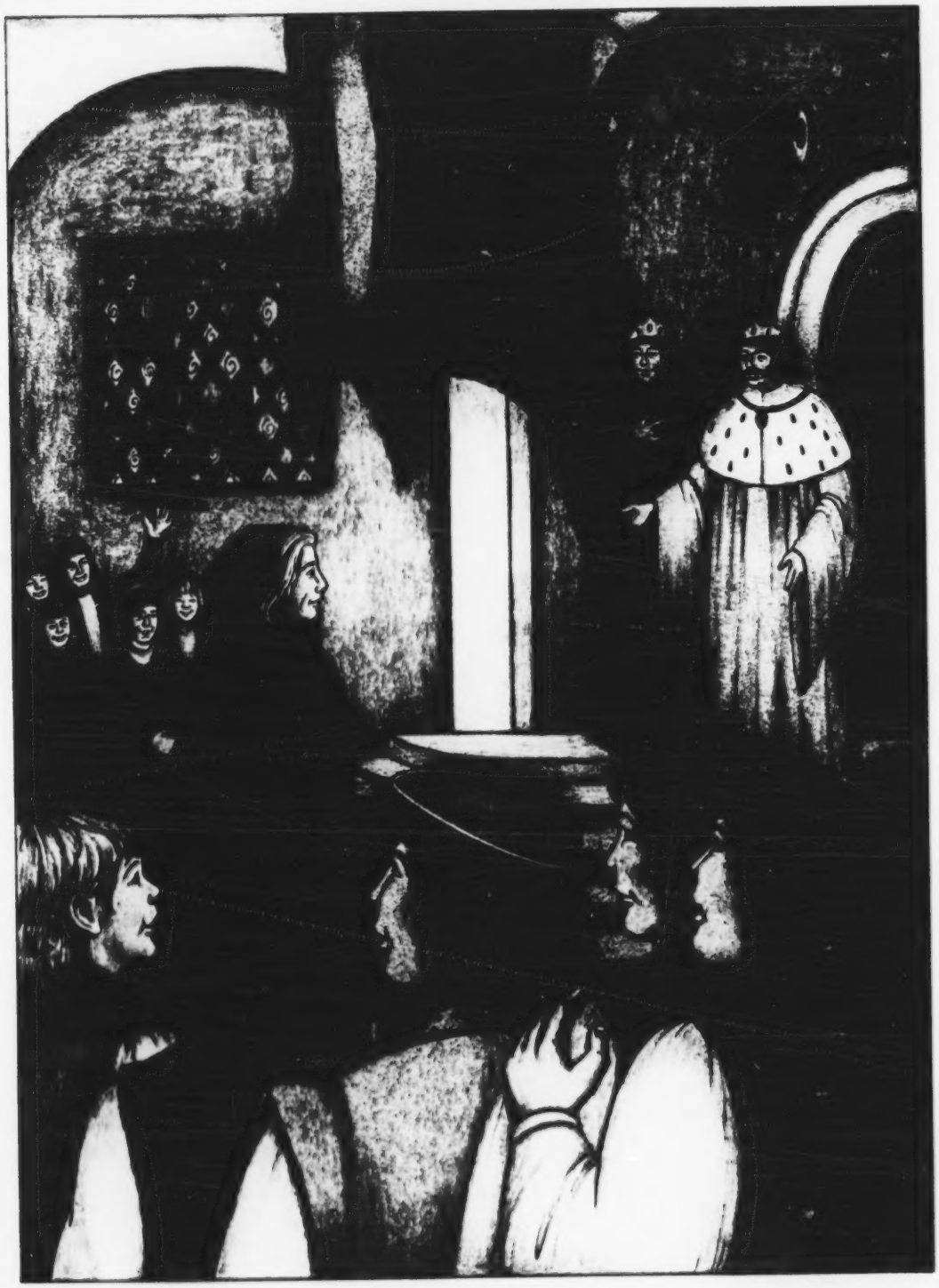
Columbus prepared for the court appearance by having elegant new clothes fashioned for himself and several of the officers. Together with the six Indians decked out in feathers, fish bones, and gold trimmings, they set out for Barcelona.

The procession that spring was the most remarkable ever in Spain. Thousands of people flocked to see the hero and the strangely painted Indians, who carried colorful parrots in cages. In Barcelona it seemed as if the whole city had come out to greet the Admiral who had discovered new lands in the East for Spain.

As Columbus approached, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella rose from their thrones to honor him. They listened to the great explorer unfold the tales of faraway lands, and they showered gratitude and praise upon this dignified mariner who now, truly, had earned the title, Admiral of the Ocean Sea. Columbus felt that his life and the success of this voyage had been a miracle because of his faith in himself and in God.

In the coming years he made three more trips to the islands of the Caribbean and to Central and South America. And although he and his other crews discovered many more exciting things and exotic places, none of the succeeding trips was as successful or glorious as the first had been.

The Admiral of the Ocean Sea died in May 1506 with his two sons and a few close friends and servants at his side. But the memory of what Columbus accomplished endures.



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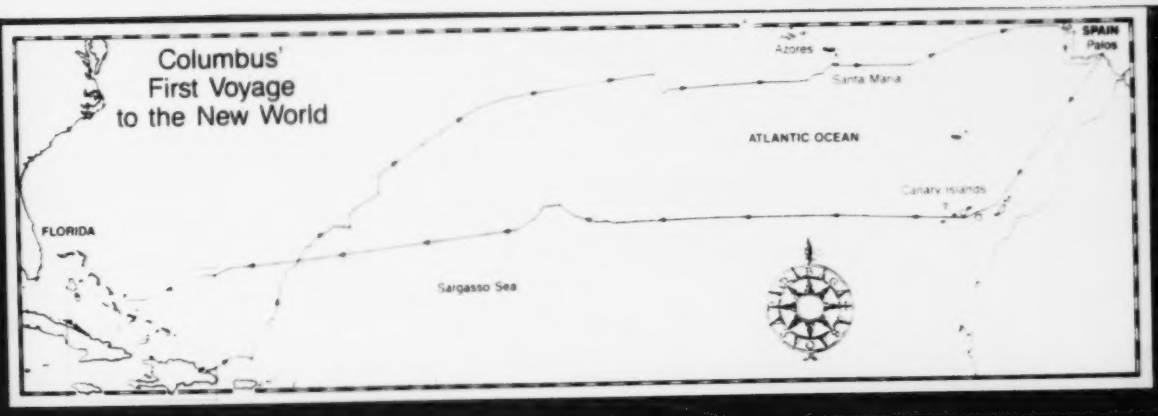
## Five Hundred Years Later

The great voyage of discovery in 1492 is one of the most outstanding achievements in history. With it, Christopher Columbus brought together two worlds, each of which had been completely unaware that the other one existed. Not all of the results of the voyage were positive, but that's another story.

What we celebrate at this quincentennial is the spirit of the young sailor from Genoa, who followed his dream and led the world to new knowledge about its geography and its people. Today this spirit is still alive, as our scientists search through microscopes, and in space, and to the depths of the oceans, bringing new discoveries to our attention. And while this spirit of exploration goes on in its modern form, people in many parts of the world pause to remember Christopher Columbus and to honor the courage and determination that he exemplified five hundred years ago.



*Above:* Sailing westward across the Sea of Darkness—now known as the Atlantic Ocean—Columbus followed a southerly course. His route home was more northerly. The trip out included a stopover in the Canary Islands, the return one in the Azores.

*Left:* Following the landfall on San Salvador in the Bahamas, Columbus' exploration took him past other islands and, eventually, to two quite large ones: Cuba and Hispaniola.

## About the Authors

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**Marion Eldridge** has illustrated many children's books. She holds art degrees from the Boston Museum School, Tufts University, and the Massachusetts College of Art. Mrs. Eldridge lives in Billerica, MA, with her husband and daughter Kate.

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